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NARCOTIC DRUGS

Summary of the Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 1990

1. In accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, 1/ the International Narcotics Control Board is required to prepare an annual report on its work and such additional reports as it considers necessary. 2/ An analogous obligation is set forth in the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971. 3/ The reports must be submitted to the Economic and Social Council through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. In each year's annual report, the Board provides a comprehensive survey of the current drug control situation in the world, 4/ and recommends action that it considers appropriate.

2. In its report for 1990, the Board notes that illicit production, trafficking and abuse of drugs, together with attendant escalating violence, continue seriously to imperil not only public health in virtually all countries but also the very lives of political leaders, public officials and private citizens in some countries. Moreover, political institutions and economies are directly threatened. Such a threat against a single State endangers the security and integrity of all members of the international community. During 1990, interlocking criminal trafficking organizations, well financed and heavily armed, wantonly murdered presidential candidates and scores of innocent victims, many of them children. Despite these ominous developments, the democratic institutions in two countries under siege, namely Colombia and Peru, have survived. Moreover, the steadfast counter-action resolutely pursued by the countries concerned resulted in the apprehension of several kingpin traffickers and the disruption of trafficking organizations.

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* E/1991/30.

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3. As a result of the continuing pressure exerted and enforcement operations undertaken during 1990 which disrupted traffickers' activities in the Andean countries, the price of coca leaf decreased in some producing areas. This has led, in some major consuming countries, to at least a temporary reduction in the availability and purity of cocaine in the illicit traffic, accompanied by higher prices. Officials in a number of countries estimate that the abuse of certain drugs had declined or stabilized in some segments of society.

4. Nevertheless, trafficking organizations, often in conjunction with terrorists, continue to forge links within countries, within regions and interregionally. According to information available to the Board, organizations in South America and Western Europe may be using each other's routes in a joint venture to smuggle cocaine to Europe and heroin to North America. Seizure data showed that such linkages are also being established between South-East Asian traffickers and criminal organizations elsewhere. The abundancy of the current supply of heroin makes this development particularly ominous.

5. The Board reiterates that the response of the international community to the traffickers must be even more forceful, more comprehensive, more innovative. Priority should be accorded by the members of the international community to enacting and vigorously pursuing comprehensive measures to contain and reduce the illicit demand for drugs; exchanging information promptly to facilitate the apprehension, arrest and extradition of traffickers and to bring them to justice; denying traffickers opportunities to launder their ill-gotten gains through legitimate enterprises and financial institutions; preventing traffickers from acquiring precursors, arms, sophisticated weaponry, aircraft, ships and the like. The Board also calls on the international community to provide, in response to requests of States under attack by traffickers, full assistance, including security devices, weapons, aircraft, ships and training. States concerned should also have access to modern technology to permit the location and environmentally safe destruction of narcotic crops; large-scale integrated rural development assistance, and marketing possibilities and fair export prices for alternative economic activities.

6. The Board believes that the foregoing measures need to be taken in tandem with efforts by the countries in which illicit and uncontrolled narcotics production takes place and has, in most of them, been long entrenched. Those countries should pursue resolutely sustained and comprehensive programmes aimed at progressively reducing and eventually eliminating such production. It remains of utmost importance that illicit cultivation should not be permitted to expand further, as has occurred in recent years when licit agricultural crops have been increasingly replaced in some areas by illicit ones. It is also essential that the producing countries concerned further develop and employ methods that permit accurate detection and large-scale environmentally safe destruction of narcotic crops.

7. The report stresses that one of the most critical and intractable components of the world-wide drug problem is the containment and reduction of spreading illicit demand, since it involves influencing and modifying human behaviour. Unless progress towards this end can be made and sustained, successes in eradicating illicit cultivation and production of narcotic drugs, as well as the

clandestine manufacture of psychotropic substances or their diversion from licit trade, can only be temporary, since one source of supply and a particular kind of drug will inevitably be substituted for another. This has been amply demonstrated in recent years.

8. However, the differing approaches to the prevention and treatment of drug abuse should be carefully evaluated and information exchanged in a timely manner. The United Nations, in co-operation with Governments and the specialized agencies concerned, should establish a mechanism to facilitate such exchanges. The toll to society in wasted lives, health costs, rising crime and lost productivity merits the most vigorous and innovative efforts by the international community. Health hazards continue to be aggravated by the growing tendency of abusers to consume simultaneously more than one drug, frequently in combination with alcohol. Such dangerous consumption patterns complicate treatment. The peril is all the more lethal because of the increasing spread of AIDS through intravenous drug abuse.

9. AIDS cases related to intravenous drug abuse are becoming ever more numerous, mainly in metropolitan areas in a number of countries. The deep anxiety throughout the world over this development is heightened by the increasing number of cases of congenital HIV infection in the newborn. The adoption of measures that may decrease the sharing of hypodermic needles among intravenous drug abusers to reduce the spread of AIDS is essential. To this end, the Board, jointly with the World Health Organization, in the context of that organization's Global Programme on AIDS, is continuing to study the legal aspects related to the controlled distribution of hypodermic needles and syringes. In this context, the Board reiterates that any prophylactic measures which are urgently needed should neither promote nor facilitate drug abuse.

10. In its report, the Board once again emphatically joins its voice with those of Governments which, both separately and collectively at the World Ministerial Summit to Reduce Demand for Drugs and to Combat the Cocaine Threat (London, 9-11 April 1990), have rejected the view expressed by some persons who advocate the legalization of the abuse of some or all drugs. Such an approach sends a signal in the wrong direction. It would undoubtedly be interpreted by potential drug abusers as sanctioning drug abuse and can be expected to lead to an explosion of abuse, accompanied by drug-related deaths and escalating health-care costs, and as well as the destruction of families and the basic values that govern behaviour in society. Moreover, any slackening of the control effort not only constitutes non-compliance with treaty obligations but is also morally indefensible and tantamount to the surrender of the world community to the drug cartels.

11. Many comprehensive plans of action available to national authorities, the United Nations, multilateral organizations and regional arrangements aimed at fighting drug abuse, illicit cultivation, manufacture and trafficking have been elaborated in recent years.

12. The Board stresses that these noble efforts can effectively reduce the vast world-wide dimensions of the drug problem only if adequate resources are provided at both the national and international levels. To date, the level of resources is in no way commensurate with the magnitude of the drug problem. Unless substantial additional resources are made available only very few of the activities envisaged

in the Global Programme of Action on international co-operation against illicit production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (see General Assembly resolution S-17/2, annex) for implementation by the United Nations itself can be carried out. The Board, therefore, appeals to the international community to provide the necessary means, through the United Nations regular budget, as well as through sustained and generous voluntary contributions. This will enable the United Nations to strengthen its impact on reducing drug abuse, illicit production and trafficking and on mobilizing Governments' concerted efforts towards these ends.

13. The report notes that on 11 November 1990, less than two years after its adoption at the Plenipotentiary Conference held in Vienna, the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances entered into force. The Board warmly welcomes this development as a further demonstration of the determination of the international community to fight against the trafficking menace. The Board also urges all States to respond affirmatively to the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Council recommending that they provisionally apply the provisions of the Convention to the greatest extent possible even before formally becoming Parties. The Board reiterates the urgent need for Governments to impose appropriately stringent penalties on traffickers, as well as to apply the provisions of the 1988 Convention relating to money laundering, seizure of assets and extradition. In addition, effective implementation of the provisions of article 12 for the control of precursors requires priority attention to prevent illicit drug manufacture.

14. Effective control of drugs used for medical and scientific purposes constitutes a basic element in the effort of the world community to prevent drug abuse. Generally speaking, the international control system elaborated in the 1961 Convention continues to operate satisfactorily. Diversion of narcotic drugs from the licit trade into illicit channels remains relatively rare and the quantities involved are small in comparison with the large volume of transactions. That holds true for drugs in both the international trade and domestic wholesale circuits.

15. With regard to the control system for psychotropic substances set forth in the 1971 Convention, many Parties and non-Parties alike apply satisfactorily the controls stipulated in the Convention for substances in Schedules I and II, as well as the special voluntary measures recommended by the Board to bolster those controls. The controls provided for in the Convention and strengthened by the voluntary measures, enable the Board, in concert with Governments, to pursue its efforts to prevent traffickers from diverting psychotropic substances from sources of licit manufacture and trade into illicit channels. Since a large number of countries comply with the voluntary measures and have done so for several years, Parties to the 1971 Convention should consider initiating amendment of the Convention pursuant to article 30, paragraphs 1 (b) and 2, in order to incorporate these measures into the text of the Convention. In the light of its experience, the Board is convinced that the extension to substances in Schedules III and IV of the import/export authorization system, as well as of reporting to the Board on the destination and origin of shipments, would provide the most effective way to prevent diversion.

16. Close co-operation between Governments and the Board thwarts the diversion of large quantities of amphetamines, methaqualone, fenetylline and secobarbital. For amphetamines and methaqualone, which were diverted in enormous quantities at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the controls have taken effect, and diversion from manufacture and international trade virtually never occurs. The controls are now also beginning to take effect with regard to fenetylline and secobarbital. In the case of fenetylline alone, since 1985 approximately 330 million tablets, amounting to almost 17 tonnes, have been prevented from falling into traffickers' hands. However, attempts at diversion continue to be made, particularly in those countries which are considered by traffickers to have inadequate national control systems. The control over international trade in Schedule II substances can, therefore, be considered to be working well. In the case of Schedule III and IV substances, however, effective control and monitoring of international trade still require more timely and determined action by some manufacturing and exporting countries, as well as by some importing countries. Despite several warnings from the Board regarding the risk of diversion of pemoline from Europe to Africa and Asia, certain exporting countries have not yet taken effective action and the substance has continued to be diverted in very large quantities. The Board believes that more than 20 tonnes (over 500 million tablets) have been diverted into illicit channels since 1988.

17. Concerning the demand for and supply of opiates for medical and scientific needs, the report notes that since 1980, following consultations by the Board with the principal producing countries which led to reductions in the area of poppy cultivation, global production of opiate raw materials and aggregate consumption of opiates have been in approximate balance. Since 1986, total production has been on average 40 tonnes below global consumption, helping to reduce excess stocks of raw materials. Information available to the Board indicates that this trend is likely to continue at least in 1990 and 1991.

18. In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/15 the Board, in conjunction with the World Health Organization, published a special report on demand for and supply of opiates for medical and scientific needs (E/INCB/1989/1/Supp.). In that resolution, the Council requested the Board to complete its assessment of legitimate needs for opiates in various regions of the world hitherto unmet because of insufficient health care, difficult economic situations or other conditions. The special report analyses the production of opiate raw materials and consumption of opiates, studies the adequacy of Governments' assessment of needs and examines impediments to medical availability of opiates. The report also makes recommendations to Governments, the World Health Organization, professional associations and medical instructors, aimed at minimizing and overcoming impediments to ensure adequate availability of opiates for treatment and management of severe pain.

19. In resolution 1990/31, the Council requested the Board to accord priority to monitoring the implementation of the recommendations contained in the special report. Accordingly, the Board is systematically reviewing, in conjunction with WHO, methods used by Governments to assess domestic medical needs for opiates with a view to recommending possible improvements. Moreover, during 1990, the Board sent a special communication to Governments asking them to provide information as

to action they are taking to carry out the specific recommendations contained in paragraph 49 of the special report. These recommendations relate to improving methods of assessing medical needs; developing a system to monitor the extent to which medical needs for opiates are being met and taking any corrective action required; identifying impediments to adequate use of opiates and facilitating their availability to manage and reduce severe pain; establishing national policies and guidelines on appropriate use of opiates for treatment; and ensuring that health professionals are adequately trained on opiate use and are informed on drug dependence. The Board is also requesting Governments to ensure that medical instructors and professional medical associations are urged to promote the rational use of opiates for medical purposes, while at the same time ensuring they will not be abused.

Notes

1/ Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 (United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 520, No. 7515, p. 151), as amended by the 1976 Protocol (United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 976, No. 14152, p. 106).

2/ Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 1990 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.90.XI.3). The report of the Board is supplemented by two detailed technical reports: "Narcotic drugs: estimated world requirements for 1991; statistics for 1989" (E/INCB/1990/2) and "Statistics on psychotropic substances for 1989" (E/INCB/1990/3).

3/ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1019, No. 14956, p. 176.

4/ Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 1990 ..., paras. 54-209.